



Maine Right-of-Way Discovery Grant Program

Town: **Harpswell**

Grant Year: **2006**

With a Maine Right-of-Way Discovery Grant, the Town of Harpswell researched three shorefront parcels where it sought to preserve public access and to assert rights to public landings and ways.

Harpswell is an active fishing community with 216 miles of shoreline. Over the past several years, the Town has taken action to identify and protect Town landings and ways in order to preserve public access to the shore. As part of the process, the Town identified three sites that required further research and investigation.

1. Giant Stairs

Donated to the Town in 1909, the Giant Stairs is one of the most scenic areas in Town with its high rocky terrain, deepwater frontage, and a natural formation of rocky stairs carved by ocean waves. A hundred or more people may visit the site on a nice summer day. However, a survey conducted in 1994 revealed uncertainty regarding the lot's southern boundary line, and structures on abutting properties have encroached on the Town-owned land. The Town wanted to conduct deed research to resolve these issues so as to protect the public's access to the waterfront.

2. Ash Point (Tidemill Cove) Landing

This is a Town landing that allows public access to Basin Cove and Potts Harbor. Next to the launch site is a reversing falls where tidal waters flow in a narrow channel between two points of land. During peak season, the landing may attract 20 or more kayaks and other small boats per day. The landing is subject to encroachment by structures, driveways, and lawns of abutting properties, and these encroachments have infringed on the rights of the public. The Town sought to work with abutters to resolve outstanding issues and to assert the Town's ownership for public access to the water.

3. Stover's Point

Ownership of a waterfront parcel at Stover's Point had been uncertain. Although it was widely believed to be owned by the Town, some owners of nearby properties questioned if this was in fact the case. The Town wanted to resolve this uncertainty in order to protect this land for current and future public use.

The Town of Harpswell applied for and received a Maine Right-of-Way Discovery Grant, which it used to conduct deed research, review surveys, and carry out negotiations. This work helped ensure that town residents and guests would continue to have waterfront access. The Town added signs, parking, and boundary markers at all sites to provide clear, safe public access, while not infringing on private property. The deed research at the Giant Stairs also provided legal support for a subsequent project to stabilize and rehabilitate the walking trail, which won an Annual Achievement Award from the Coalition for Recreational Trails.

